DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 372 CG 014 096

AUTHOR Chelune, Gordon J.
TITLE Disclosure Flexibility and Interpersonal Functioning.
PUB DATE Sep 79
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (87th, New York, NY, September 1-5, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Behavior Patterns; College Students; *Disclosure; *Interpersonal Competence; Neurosis; *Self Esteem; *Sex Differences; *Social Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Loneliness

ABSTRACT

The relationship between dispositional level of self-disclosure or disclosure flexibility--a measure of appropriateness of self-disclosure with respect to social-situational norms--and indices of effective interpersonal functioning were investigated in two experiments. Results of Study I revealed that when differences in social desirability were statistically controlled, females were significantly more neurotic than males, and disclosure flexibility interacted with dispositional level of disclosure. Those medium disclosers who were willing to disclose in accordance with social norms were significantly less neurotic than those whose disclosures deviated from the norms. Results of study II, which examined the effects of disclosure on measures of loneliness, ratings of social skills, and social activity, found that dispositional level of disclosure was inversely related to loneliness and interacted with disclosure flexibility. Appropriate medium disclosure across situations was more highly associated with lower levels of loneliness than inappropriate disclosure. Peer- and observer-ratings of social skills were positively related to dispositional disclosure, but not to disclosure flexibility or level of loneliness. Among lonely subjects, there was a trend for disclosure flexibility to be associated with different levels of social activity. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Paper presented at the 87th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, New York, September, 1979

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gordon J. Chelune
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED181372

DISCLOSURE FLEXIBILITY AND INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONING

Gordon J. Chelune

University of Georgia

Despite the heuristic appeal of the theoretical relationship between self-disclosure and effective interpersonal functioning (Jourard, 1964; Mowrer, 1961; Rogers, 1961), research aimed at demonstrating this relationship has produced inconclusive results (Archer, 1979; Cozby, 1973). Several possible explanations have been advanced to account for these equivocal results. Altman and Taylor (1973) and Cozby (1973) have noted that a major difficulty with early research in this area has been the tendency to view self-disclosure as a global personality trait rather than acknowledging the importance of situational factors in determining the level of behavioral disclosure. Another explanation is that self-disclosure may be related to interpersonal functioning in a curvilinear manner, that is, too much or too little disclosure in a given situation may be characteristic of personality disturbance (Jourard, 1964). Typical research using linear models of analyses (i.e., correlational and two-group designs) would not detect such a curvilinear relationship (Chelune, 1978; Cozby, 1973). A final possible explanation for the lack of support for a relationship between self-disclosure and interpersonal functioning is that disclosure per se may not be directly related to adaptive functioning (Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975), but rather may interact with other variables to determine its appropriateness (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979).

One possible mediating variable is the ability to adjust or adapt to situational changes. Such an ability is generally considered to be indicative of positive mental functioning (Freeman & Giovannoni, 1969). Within the context of self-disclosure, Chelune (1975) has suggested that disclosure flexibility, the ability to adequately differentiate various situational and interpersonal cues and adapt one's disclosures accordingly, has important implications for effective interpersonal functioning. The individual who is able to modulate his/her dispositional level of disclosure "across a wider range of social situations in response to situational and interpersonal demands will function interpersonally more adequately than the less flexible individual who has not learned the discriminant cues that signal whether disclosure is appropriate or inappropriate (Chelune, 1977, pp. 1139-1140).

The present paper reports data from two studies which examine the effects of disclosure flexibility and dispositional self-disclosure on measures of personality health and interpersonal functioning. Study I examines the effects of high and low flexibility across three levels of dispositional disclosure on a measure of neuroticism. Study II extends this design to examine the effects of disclosure on measures of loneliness, social activity, peer-reports of social skill,

CG 014096

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

and self- and observer-ratings of social skill in a behavioral role play.

Study I

Method

Subjects. The subjects (N=183) were 93 male and 90 female undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at the University of Georgia. The subjects were tested in a group setting and administered the following measures.

Measures

Self-Disclosure Situations Survey (SDSS). This inventory consists of 20 social situations that systematically vary in terms of both situational and interpersonal variables, and therefore differ in their pull for disclosure (Chelune, 1976). Subjects are instructed to imagine themselves in each situation and then rate the situation on a 6-point scale for how willing they would be to disclose intimate information in that situation. In addition to assessing the subject's dispositional level of disclosure across situations, an index of self-disclosure flexibility can also be computed by subtracting the subject's response to each situation from previously established norms for the 20 situations. The absolute difference between the subject's response to a given situation and the corresponding norm are converted to standard scores and summed across situations. The resulting deviation score represents the degree to which the subject varies his/her disclosures in an appropriate or normative fashion in response to varying social-situational cues.

Eysenck Personality Inventory. This self-report instrument consists of 57 "Yes-No" items that measure two independent personality dimensions: introversion-extraversion and neuroticism-stability (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968). The present study examined only the neuroticism score, which reflects tendencies to be emotionally labile and overresponsive under stress.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS). This 33-item "True-False" inventory assesses need for approval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), and was administered in the present study to control for possible biases from stereotypic portrayals of socially acceptable self-images among the subjects (Gorman, 1968).

Results and Discussion.

Preliminary analyses revealed no significant sex differences for total self-disclosure, disclosure flexibility deviations, neuroticism, or social desirability. Neuroticism was moderately correlated with social desirability ($r = -.52$), and weakly, but significantly, correlated with total self-disclosure ($r = -.18$). No other significant correlations among the variables were observed.

To examine the effects of disclosure flexibility and level of total self-disclosure on neuroticism, subjects were grouped into a 2 X 2 X 3 Sex X Flexibility Level X Total Self-Disclosure matrix. The high and low flexibility deviation groups across low, medium and

high levels of total self-disclosure were created by rank ordering the scores on both variables and assigning the subjects to the appropriate cells of the matrix. Results of the 2 X 2 X 3 analysis of variance revealed no significant main effects or interactions, although the Flexibility Level X Total Self-Disclosure interaction did approach significance ($p < .10$).

To control for the possible confounding effects of social desirability on the neuroticism scores, an analysis of covariance was performed with MCSDS as the covariate. The results of this analysis revealed several significant differences. As expected, the covariate, social desirability, was highly significant, $F(1,177) = 68.58$, $p < .001$. A significant main effect for sex was found when MCSDS was covaried, $F(1,177) = 5.52$, $p < .02$, with females scoring higher ($M = 12.07$) on the neuroticism scale than males ($M = 10.62$). The Flexibility Level X Total Self-Disclosure interaction was also significant, $F(2,177) = 3.41$, $p < .035$.

The means for the interaction between flexibility level and total self-disclosure are displayed in Figure 1. As can be seen, there is a difference in neuroticism among the medium disclosers

---

Insert Figure 1 about here

---

depending on whether they adhere to social norms across situations (low deviation group) or stray from them (high deviation group). Those medium disclosers who were willing to disclose in accordance with the normative pattern were significantly less neurotic than those whose degree of willingness to disclose deviated from the normative profile. The fact that this difference was not observed for the high and low disclosure groups may be a function of how the deviation scores were derived. Medium disclosers have the potential of deviating in both a high and a low direction, whereas high and low disclosers can deviate in only one direction.

Study II

Method

Subjects. Subjects consisted of 150 unmarried female undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at the University of Georgia. All subjects filled out a number of self-report questionnaires and participated in a behavioral role play as part of a larger study reported elsewhere (Williams, 1979).

Measures.

Self-Disclosure Situations Survey (SDSS). This 20-item inventory is described in Study I.

UCLA Loneliness Scale. This scale provides a brief 20-item general measure of loneliness and has been found to have satisfactory reliability and validity (Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson, 1978).

Social Introversion (Si) Scale. The 70-items of the Social Introversion Scale of the MMPI were reproduced in their original order (Drake, 1946) in a separate inventory and administered with the standard MMPI instructions. Individuals scoring high on this scale are described as "more comfortable alone or with a few close friends, reserved, shy, lacking self-confidence, and uncomfortable around members of the opposite sex" (Graham, 1977).

Activity Questionnaire. This questionnaire assessed the frequency of participation in social activities. The questionnaire instructed subjects to check those activities they participated in with another person from a list of university sponsored events for each day of the month immediately preceding the experimental session. An "other" category also allowed the subjects to describe non-university sponsored events (e.g. dinner dates). The total number of activities checked constituted each subject's score.

Role Play. Each subject was asked to individually interact with a male confederate for approximately 5 minutes while her behavior was observed and tape recorded by two observers behind a one-way mirror. The subjects were instructed to initiate and maintain a conversation with the confederate by pretending that he was another subject waiting for a psychology experiment and that he was someone they would like to know better.

Role-Play Measures. In addition to scoring a number of specific behaviors as part of the larger study (Williams, 1979), the observers independently made a global rating of social skill on a 5-point scale for each subject. Similarily, following the role play, each subject was asked to rate on a 5-point scale her self-perceived social skill in the role play.

Peer-Rating of Social Skill. A peer-rating of the subject's social skill was also obtained with the subject's consent by means of a telephone interview. Peer-ratings were obtained for 142 of the 150 subjects.

Results and Discussion.

Subjects were classified into high and low flexibility deviation groups within high, medium, and low total disclosure classifications on the basis of their scores on the SDSS using the procedure described in Study I. A 3 X 2 Total Self-Disclosure X Flexibility Level analysis of variance was computed for loneliness. Results yielded a significant main effect for Total Self-Disclosure, $F(2,144) = 7.29$, $p < .001$, with greater loneliness associated with lower total disclosure. The two-way interaction between flexibility level and total disclosure was also significant, $F(2,144) = 6.31$, $p < .002$. The means associated with this interaction are depicted in Figure 2. As in the analysis

Insert Figure 2 about here

for neuroticism in Study I, the major difference between flexibility levels occurred among the medium disclosers. Medium disclosers whose patterns of willingness to disclose across the SDSS situations deviated from the normative profile were significantly more lonely than those subjects whose pattern of medium disclosure willingness adhered more closely to it.

To determine whether high and low subject loneliness interacted with disclosure flexibility and total disclosure in terms of social skill, separate 3 X 2 X 2 Total Self-Disclosure X Flexibility Level X Loneliness analyses of variance were computed for each of the measures of social skill. Results of the analysis of variance for self-ratings of social skill in the role-play yielded no significant differences. The only significant differences found in the analyses of peer- and observer-ratings of social skill were for the main effect of Total Self-Disclosure, $F(2,138) = 4.75$, $p < .01$ and $F(2,129) = 3.09$, $p < .05$, respectively. In both cases, higher willingness to disclose across situations were associated with higher ratings of social skill. Thus, for women, greater willingness to disclose appears to be related to other's, but not self, evaluations of social skill.

The final analyses examined Total Self-Disclosure X Flexibility Level X Loneliness effects upon the total number of social activities engaged in by the subjects. Initial results indicated no significant differences, although the Flexibility Level X Loneliness interaction approached statistical significance, $F(1,138) = 2.99$, $p < .09$. Since the Si Scale showed a small, but significant correlation with the Activities Questionnaire ($r = -.18$) and a moderate correlation with Loneliness ($r = .52$), social introversion was covaried. Again no statistically significant differences were observed, but the Flexibility Level X Loneliness interaction came closer to significance, $F(1,137) = 3.46$, $p < .065$. Because of the potential clinical implications of this near significant interaction, its means are presented in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

As can be seen in this graph, there is little difference between the two flexibility groups in terms of number of activities engaged in among individuals reporting low levels of loneliness. However, among lonely individuals, the two flexibility groups show divergent response patterns. When lonely, women whose disclosure patterns vary in response to the normative pull of social-situational cues in the environment seem to show increased levels of social activity, whereas women whose pattern of disclosures deviates from normal expectations show decreased levels of social activity.

From a clinical point of view, this interaction may have important treatment implications for lonely women, if not for males also. When lonely people present themselves for therapy, a common treatment strategy would be to seek to increase their social skills and social behaviors. While this type of treatment approach would seem to fit the high flexibility deviation group, it does not seem appropriate for the low flexibility deviation group. These women are already engaged in numerous social activities, and their low deviations from normative expectations for disclosure in a variety of social situations suggest that they do not have a skills deficit. The present results suggest that a different treatment strategy would be more appropriate for them, and that individuals who present themselves as being lonely should not be considered a homogenous group in terms of their treatment needs.

References

Altman, S. & Taylor, D. A. Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Archer, R. The role of personality and the social situation. In G. J. Chelune (Ed.) Self-disclosure: Origins, patterns and implications for openness in interpersonal communication. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979 (Nov.).

Chaikin, A. L., Derlega, V. J., Bayma, B., & Shaw, J. Neuroticism and disclosure reciprocity. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1975, 43, 13-19.

Chelune, G. J. Self-disclosure: An elaboration of its basic dimensions. Psychology Reports, 1975, 36, 79-85.

Chelune, G. J. The Self-Disclosure Situations Survey: A new approach to measuring self-disclosure. JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 1976, 6, 111-112, (Order Ms. 1367).

Chelune, G. J. Disclosure Flexibility and Social-Situational Perceptions. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1977, 45, 1139-1143.

Chelune, G. J. Nature and assessment of self-disclosing behavior. In P. McReynolds (Ed.) Advances in psychological assessment (Vol. 4). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978.

Cozby, P. Self-disclosure: A literature review. Psychological Bulletin, 1973, 79, 73-91.

Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. The approval motive: Studies in evaluative dependence. New York: Wiley, 1964.

Drake, L. E. A social I.E. scale for the MMPI. Journal of Applied Psychology, 1946, 30, 51-54.

Derlega, V. J., & Grzelak, J. Appropriateness of self-disclosure. In G. J. Chelune (Ed.) Self-disclosure: Origins, patterns and implications for openness in interpersonal communication. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979 (Nov.).

Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. Manual for the Eysenck Personality Inventory. San Diego: Educational and Industrial Testing Service, 1968.

Freeman, H., & Giovannoni, J. Social psychology of mental health. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), Handbook of social psychology, (Vol. 5). Menlo Park, Calif.: Addison-Wesley, 1969.

Gorman, B. S. Social desirability factors and the Eysenck Personality Inventory. Journal of Psychology, 1968, 69, 75-83.

Graham, J. R. The MMPI: A practical guide. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Jourard, S. M. The transparent self. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1964.

Mowrer, O. H. The crisis in psychiatry and religion. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1961.

Rogers, C. On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.

Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Ferguson, M. L. Developing a measure of loneliness. Journal of Personality Assessment, 1978, 42, 290-294.

Williams, C. L. A comparison of a behavioral role play and an empirical self-report inventory in assessing social behavior. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 1979.

Figure 1

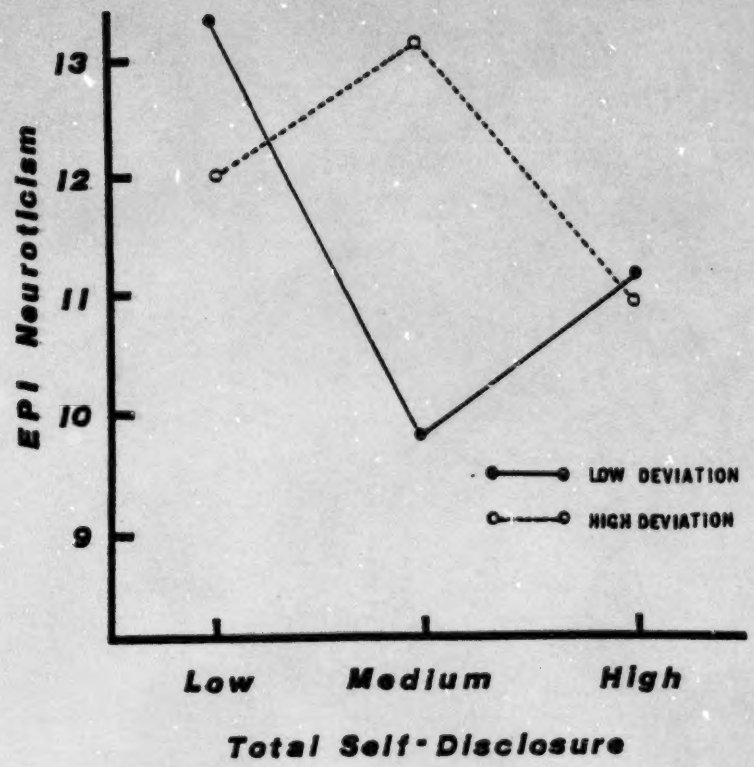
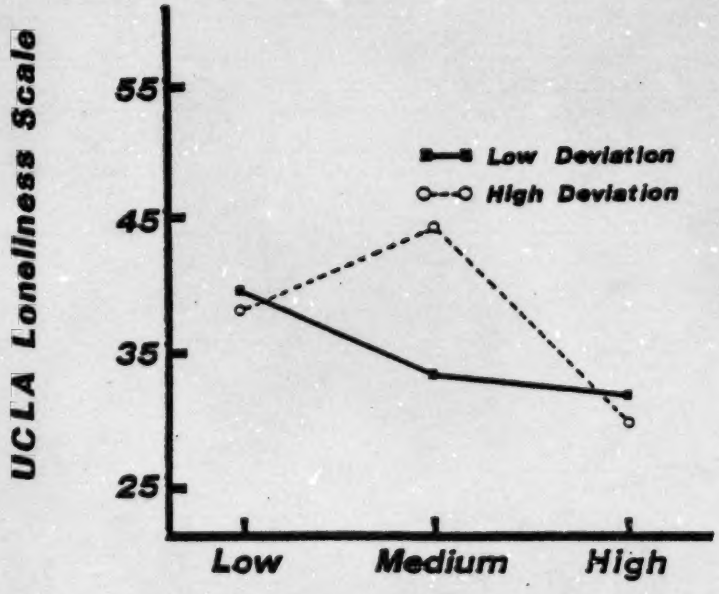
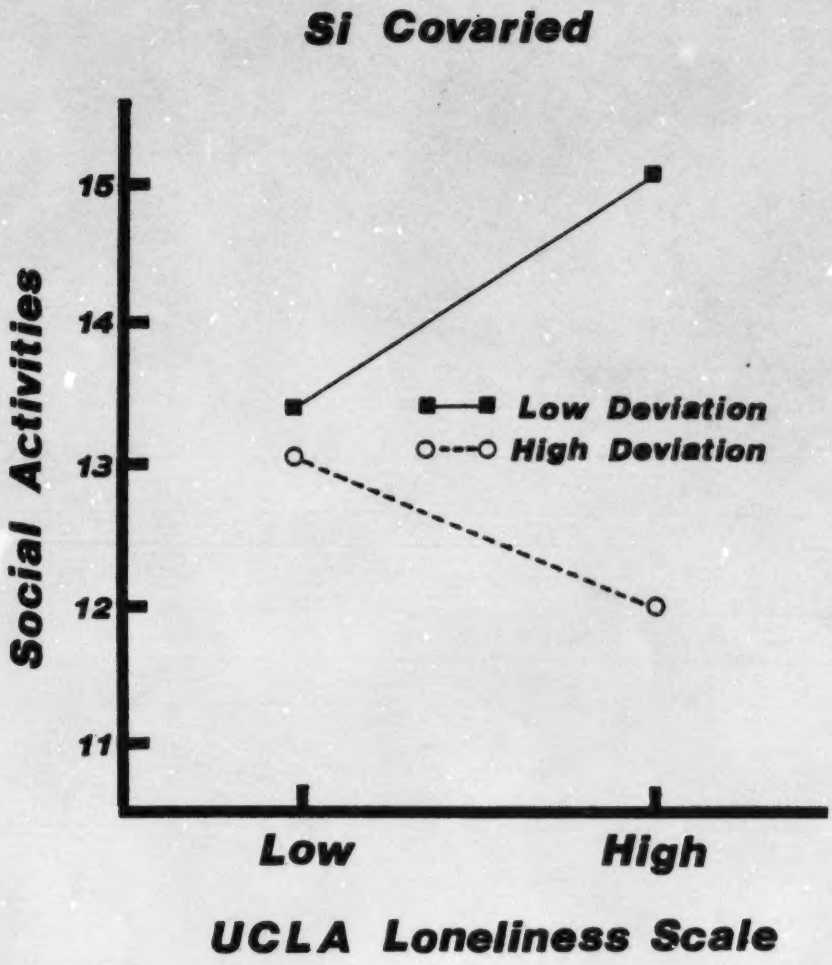


Figure 2




Si Covaried
Social Activities
15
14
13
12
11
Low Deviation
High Deviation
Low
High
UCLA Loneliness Scale